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Controlling Pocket Gophers

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controlling Pocket Gophers

Developed cooperatively by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

Pocket gophers get their name from the fur-lined, pocket-like cheek pouches in which food is carried. They live in an underground burrow system, often a network of several hundred feet ranging in depth from a few inches to several feet. Several gophers may inhabit a single burrow system. Soil removed from newly-made burrows is pushed into mounds on the surface, usually leaving a small horseshoe-like depression on one side of the mound, indicating the direction of the tunnel.



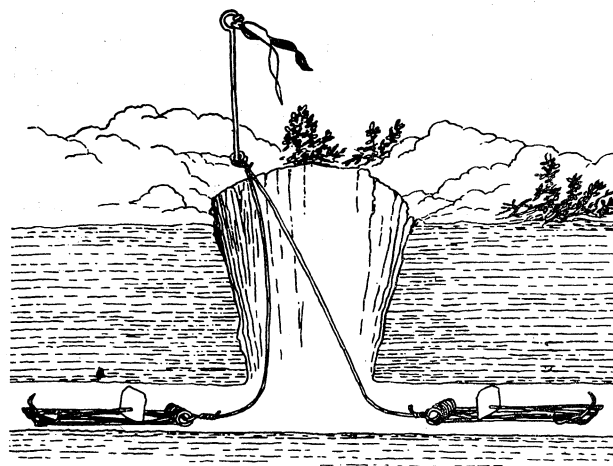
Pocket Gopher Mound

Some gophers may make 100 or more mounds in a season. Most mounds are made in late summer and fall when digging shallow burrows to get roots for winter. Roots are usually stored in small chambers, often a few inches deep and containing a quart or two of food. Gophers are active in the winter. Breeding begins as frost leaves the ground and is completed in late spring. One or two litters of two to four young are born during this period. The young begin to move throughout the burrow system when they are about one month old. Due to various causes, juvenile mortality is very high. In late summer and early fall, many young gophers are forced to the surface and wander about searching for a home. They will invade any unused burrow systems.

Control - Control methods are more effective during the spring and fall when pocket gophers are most active. This activity can be noted by the presence of fresh mounds of dirt.

Traps and poisoned baits are the most practical methods of control. On small areas where a few animals are involved, trapping or hand baiting is effective. Over large and heavily infested areas, baiting with a burrow builder is more efficient.

Control by Trapping - To locate the runway use a stout garden trowel or shovel. Scrape the dirt from a fresh mound until a round circle of fresh dirt is found plugging the lateral runway. Open the lateral and put one trap with the claws away from the opening. However, it is usually better to dig down the lateral into the main runway and then place two traps back to back in the main runway. Secure the traps with a piece of flexible wire attached to a stake. The hole can be left either open or closed.



Proper way to set two traps in main runway.

Control with Poisoned Bait - For information concerning poisoned bait materials registered for this use, contact State Pesticides personnel or Cooperative Extension Service.

Two baiting methods are effective. One method involves dropping baits by hand into the underground runways. With the other method, a tractor-drawn machine called a "burrow builder" is used to make artificial burrows and automatically drop baits into them.

Burrow Builder - On large and heavily infested areas, use a burrow builder to make artificial burrows 20 feet apart across the field at the same depth as the natural burrows. Drop poisoned baits mechanically at 9-12 inch intervals in the artificial burrow. One to two pounds of bait material will treat one acre.

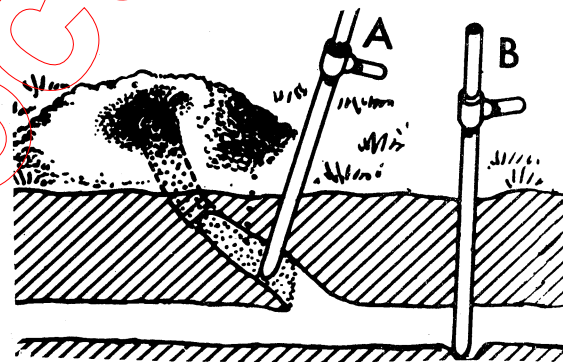
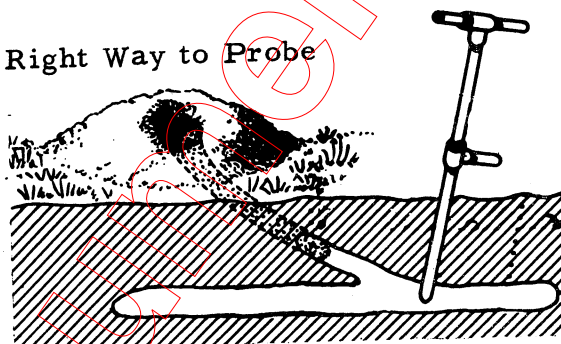
Hand Baiting - Remove the earth plug from the lateral tunnel of a fresh mound of dirt. Insert a tablespoonful of poisoned bait into the main runway with a long handled spoon. Cover the opening as to exclude light and loose dirt. The main runway can also be located by probing with a stick or metal rod about 8-18 inches back from the plug mark in the ground.

When the runway is found, enlarge the hole to put in the bait and cover as before. After 48 hours, scrape over mounds and re-treat those still active. One pound of poisoned bait material will treat five to eight acres.

For extensive handbaiting, good probes can be made of 3/4-inch pipe welded to a blunt point and cut to 34 inches in length. A foot rest can be made 16 inches from the end.

6/81

Right Way to Probe



Wrong Way to Probe

- A. Probe is in plugged lateral.
- B. Probe too deep, bait deposited below floor of tunnel.